

6201 Newburn Dr.  
Bethesda, MD 20816  
3/24/99

Commissioner Jane E. Henney MD

FDA(HFE-88)

5600 Fishers Lane

Rockville, MD 20816

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Dear Commissioner Henney:

I think irradiation is not a good idea. This a relatively simple process in which conveyer belts carry raw meat or other products through a machine that bombards it with radiation. Typically 1-7 kiloGrays, though a 0.6 kiloGray dose is considered lethal to humans. Irradiation may also give raw meat a darker color or "off odor" says microbiologist Jim Dickson. Meat processors estimate that irradiation could add to the cost of food.

One reason I think irradiation is not a good idea is because the irradiated foods now available mainly in specialty shops are clearly marked, but by law, hospitals and restaurants do not have to disclose when they serve them. Most Americans do not know about the loophole, and apparently would not like it. In a 1996 poll, 92% said they wanted to know if their food was irradiated, according to Jim Dickson.

Another reason I think irradiation is not a good idea is because foes of irradiation include nutrition and consumer groups that say it's no cure for sloppy work at slaughterhouses that handle 300 cows an hour. They contend the process itself poses health risks. For example, a New Jersey Medical School report says that animals fed irradiated food lost weight and had miscarriages, and that irradiation damages vitamins in food. "With irradiation we're trading a problem today, E. coli, for a potentially greater problem down the road," says Michael Jacobson.

Another thing for you to take into consideration is that the irradiation question is so complex that even the Center for Science in the Public Interest - the nutrition watchdog group that considers movie popcorn death in a bucket - gives an equivocal response. Executive Director Michael Jacobson says he and his colleagues are "begrudging acceptors" of irradiation. Only if solutions such as steam-cleaning carcasses and inoculating animals fail, he says, should the food industry peruse irradiation: "It should be a last resort."

Please take my opinion into consideration and rethink your decision about irradiation. I do not think this is a good idea and I personally would not eat irradiated food.

Sincerely,

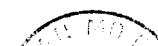
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